

**UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS**  
MARINE CORPS CIVIL-MILITARY OPERATIONS SCHOOL  
WEAPONS TRAINING BATTALION  
TRAINING COMMAND  
2300 LOUIS ROAD (C478)  
QUANTICO, VA 22134-5036

## **STUDENT OUTLINE**

### **INTRODUCTION TO OPERATIONAL CULTURE**

**0530-102**

**CIVIL AFFAIRS OFFICER COURSE**

**M020A3D**

**FEBRUARY 2016**

## **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

a. **TERMINAL LEARNING OBJECTIVE**. Given an operational environment, integrate Operational Culture Principles, to enhance the understanding of the operational environment in accordance with MCRP 3-33.1H App F. (CACT-EXE-2019)

b. **ENABLING LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

(1) Without the aid of references, define the five dimensions of operational culture, in accordance with Op Culture for the Warfighter, Ch 1. (CACT-EXE-2019a)

(2) Without the aid of references, identify cultural considerations regarding people's use of the physical environment, in accordance with Op Culture for the Warfighter, Ch 3. (CACT-EXE-2019b)

(3) Without the aid of references, identify cultural considerations regarding the economy, in accordance with Op Culture for the Warfighter, Ch 4. (CACT-EXE-2019c)

(4) Without the aid of references, identify cultural considerations regarding the social structure, in accordance with Op Culture for the Warfighter, Ch 5. (CACT-EXE-2019d)

(5) Without the aid of references, identify cultural considerations regarding the political structures, in accordance with Op Culture for the Warfighter, Ch 6. (CACT-EXE-2019e)

(6) Without the aid of references, identify cultural considerations regarding the belief systems, in accordance with Op Culture for the Warfighter, Ch 7. (CACT-EXE-2019f)

(7) Given a scenario and role players, demonstrate cross-cultural skills, in accordance with the PE checklist. (CACT-EXE-2019g)

## 1. OPERATIONAL CULTURE

a. How Does Culture Affect Operations? As recent military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have revealed, today's conflicts require not only the understanding of the physical environment but also an understanding of the population and the cultural or human environment. Culture shapes our world view or perception of events; it is composed of a pattern of relationships and structures and is varied and dynamic. It is not a check-in-the-box factor that can be reduced to a map and predicted with scientific certainty; it is complex. Culture should be understood and included in operational planning, training and execution. This is called operational culture.

b. Engaging Locals. For the Marine, Operational Culture is not simply a thing or feature outside of the battlespace. Rather, it is a continual process of individual and collective learning about contemporary and future operations. Marines who recognize the nature and significance of operational culture, and engage in continuous operational culture learning, embrace the identity of a "culture operator."

c. ASCOPE/PMESII. We have numerous tools to help understand and frame the battlespace. Civil Affairs (CA) Marines often use the ASCOPE/PMESII analysis to understand the civil dimension of the battlespace. Using ASCOPE/PMESII, CA Marines consider **A**reas, **S**tructures, **C**apabilities, **O**rganizations, **P**eople and **E**vents within the context of local or "host nation" interrelated **P**olitical, **M**military, **E**conomic, **S**ocial, **I**nfrastructure systems (PMESII) and how the civil dimension may impact or be impacted by military operations. While useful, it only provides the surface details. When we overlay an operational culture analysis utilizing the environment, the economy, social organization, political structures and belief systems we are able to derive a much deeper understanding of the operational environment.

## 2. THE FRAMEWORK AND FIVE DIMENSIONS

a. Anthropologic Model. While the military has developed many models of culture, most models are not based on scientific research. The five dimensions of culture are not a list of different cultural facts someone thinks are important. It is founded on 150 years of studies of other cultures. These studies teach us that all people, regardless of their culture, share certain ways of organizing and interacting with each other based on five different dimensions.

b. **Applicability.** The five dimensions therefore can be applied to any culture. When applied, Marine Corps planners have a tool that does not have to be created each time a mission is assigned. With this tool, you are able to think about aspects of a particular culture which most affect planning and execution. Without such a framework, cultural information can be left out or labeled inappropriately.

c. **Interrelationship.** The five dimensions are intrinsically connected; each affects the other. By teaching Marines to think about the connections between the dimensions, the Marine can begin to think through actions and the resulting second and third order effects. This will assist in determining consequences of each action. For example, if I do this, then this happens, which will cause this to happen.

d. **Five Critical Cultural Dimensions.** The five critical cultural dimensions are: Culture and the physical environment; culture and local economies; social organization and power; political structures and leadership; and cultural belief systems.

(1) **Culture and the Physical Environment.** In preparing an operational plan that includes cultural factors, Marines need to understand the close relationship between a local community and its physical environment. All cultures have developed a unique interdependent relationship with their physical environment. Operationally relevant features of the physical environment that must be considered are: water, land, food, materials for shelter, fuel/power and transportation and communications.

(a) **Water.** Because water is so precious, many societies have intricate and often unspoken rules that regulate the use of water. Marines should consider the following: Are there cultural rules about its use? What use does it have in ritual? Does it have symbolic significance? Who controls it and does it equal power? Who in society has a function related to it? How do supply and demand relate? What is expected of Marines? What operational considerations have water repercussions?

(b) **Land.** Similar to water, Marines need to understand local perspectives with regard to land. Is there symbolic meaning of division? Are there visually striking land formations with cultural significance? Are there places that only certain members of society can go? Are there certain

places considered taboo for Marines to go? Local conventions for ownership? The relationship between political map and local boundaries?

(c) Food. Marines need to consider that what they eat and how they eat can vary greatly from what locals within their operating space consume. Marines should consider: What are the local staples? Are there health concerns with local food? Who serves the food? Will our operations have an impact on the local food supply? Is there ritual significance to certain food? Are there calendar related roles of food? Is there control of food and by whom? What is considered enough food here?

(d) Materials for Shelter. Around the world people build their homes to fit their environment. Marines should consider the following: How do structures fit the geography? What materials are used for shelter? What materials or appearances match the use or indicate the type of structure? Tactical implications of styles or layout?

(e) Fuel/Power. All societies need fuel to cook, heat and provide light. Marines should assess how their operations affect the ability of locals to access fuel and should consider: What sources of fuel is used locally? Where does it come from and who provides it? Are there "work arounds" for fuel shortages? What are larger issues affecting the sources of fuel or power?

(f) Climate and Seasons. Marines need to understand climate and seasons not just for the impact on MAGTF operations, but on local activities. Considerations include: How does the climate and/or seasons influence local attitudes and capabilities for work, business, or combat? What is considered good weather or bad weather by the locals?

(g) Transportation & communications. All cultural groups have devised ways to transfer goods, people and information from one place to another. Marines should consider: What forms are used? What type of support services exist? Do Vessels double as residence/business? What infrastructure supports these? From where do imports come? Do sub groups share in unique ways? Do communication methods differ by age or gender? Are there gathering places to exchange info?

(2) Culture and Local Economies. There are numerous economic exchanges that never use money. Moreover, much of

human economic interaction is not regulated, taxed, or measured by national governments. For the Marine working in a foreign area of operations, understanding and working with these other forms of economic exchange may be critical to success in local operations.

(a) Goods and services. All cultures have a specific system for obtaining, producing and distributing the items that people need or want to survive in their society (food, water, cars, houses etc.). This system (which does not necessarily require money or banks) is called the economy of a culture. Aspects to consider within the economy of a culture are the economic exchange systems and the formal and informal economies that the culture uses. Additionally, cultural operators must consider how the economy impacts the structuring of social relationships.

(b) Economic exchanges. Marines should understand there are different ways to categorize economies. They include: Formal - economic exchanges and interactions that are regulated, taxed, tracked, and measured by a state government. Informal - often permanent and normal feature of all human behavior. Marines should understand three concerns for informal economy (tax, influence, non-state funding). Additionally, there are three types of goods/services in informal economies: illegal (e.g. - bribery), quasi-legal (unlicensed street vendor or cash discount), and ignored (baby-sitter/lawn/lemonade).

(c) Informal economies. Marines should consider the following with regard to informal economies: What categories of people work in them? What commodities or services are exchanged? What is its relationship to crime and violence? How do our operations impact it? How does that affect the people and attitudes towards us? How does the formal rely on the informal? What is the expected state involvement? What is considered illegal? What are legal, but frowned upon? How will our money affect the informal economy, its actors, and power?

(d) Network of exchange. Networks of exchange or trade create social relationships between people. Marines should consider: How resources are obtained. How critical services are accessed. Do our operations improve or block either? Is there inequity in the system? Who controls the exchange? What is the exchange method (money)? Can we adjust to this system?

(e) Structuring social relationships.

Anthropologists have identified four main economic systems of people based on the environments in which they live - hunter-gatherer (not to be discussed) pastoralism, agriculture, industrial production. Marines should consider: What kind of system is in place (pastoral, agriculture, industrial, combination)? What are the economic rhythms of community? How is wealth distributed?

(3) Social Organization and Power. Every cultural group organizes the relationships among people. The way of organizing relationships defines the kinds of interactions people can have with each other. The resulting pattern of relationships can be described in terms of a structure. This structure places boundaries on people's behaviors, and limits access to certain people. This structure also connects individuals and groups, and defines the kinds of interactions they can have. This is the social structure of a culture.

The roles, status and power. All cultures assign people different roles, status and power within the group. The way that people organize themselves and distribute power and status is called their social structure. While there are many possible ways to categorize people, most societies around the world differentiate people on the basis of the following characteristics: Age, gender, kinship / tribal affiliation, class, ethnicity / race, religious membership.

(a) Age. Almost every culture group around the world assigns different roles, status, and tasks to people on the basis of their age. Marines should consider: At what age is a person an adult? Is there a ceremony for that change? Are adults granted certain privileges? What are the economic roles of children? Are there children soldiers and how do we prepare for that? What is considered elderly and how are they treated? Are there specific stages to growing older?

(b) Gender. Every culture assigns different roles to men and women. Marines should consider: Are there cultural roles for each gender? Are there different rules for the workspace? What is normal interaction between genders? Is combat reserved for one or both? Is there different influence behind the scenes? How do we prepare for the differences?

(C) Tribal / Kinship. Almost every culture group around the world identifies members as belonging to a family or kin group. Marines should consider: How are resources or access

to them divided? Will our operations bolster or undermine some groups? What are the outcomes or responses of these groups? Do our points of contact upset normal relationships?

(d) Class. As societies become larger and more complex, they begin to stratify and distinguish among people through a fourth category - class (other categories - age, gender and kinship). Marines should consider: How is it defined (wealth, education, religion, birth)? Are there certain privileges for some classes? Are there differences in access to resources? Will social programs have to filter through upper class? Is there class mobility? How will our operations affect the classes?

(e) Ethnicity. Ethnicity can be seen as a form of group membership. Marines should consider: Is there a relationship between ethnicity and power? How do others challenge the system? What are local assumptions of the U.S. position? With whom do we make our alliances? Who do we ignore? Has there been historical interaction between a certain ethnicity?

(f) Religious membership. A group of people can consider themselves to be united by religious faith. Marines should consider: How do people define and express religion? What roles do the different religious groups hold in society? What does geography mean to groups? How do our operations or alliances affect religious order or beliefs?

(4) Political Structures and Leadership. We have seen that economic and social structures shape the distribution of power and authority in a group. The map of that power and authority reveals a group's political structure, expressed in political mechanisms and relationships. We define political structure as the way that power and leadership are apportioned to people, and exercised according to the social structure of the society.

(a) Culture and authority / leadership. How do people in the culture determine authority and leadership? All cultures have a system that determines who leads the group and makes decisions about its welfare. How a group is ruled (and it may not be by a specific person or set of people) is referred to as the political structure of a culture. Considerations include formal (official recognition) versus informal leadership (respected members of a community) and/or authority vs power.



(b) Leadership. Marines are accustomed to hierarchical political (and military) systems run by a clear formalized leader. Many societies around the world do not have centralized leadership systems. Marines need to understand how formal leaders are designated and how "effective" leadership is exercised. Considerations include: How decisions are made. Who leaders consult. Who they answer to. How leadership is obtained. What symbols of leadership are worn/carried? To whom do people actually turn to get something done? What is the relationship between the formal and informal leader?

(c) Law. Notions of law and who enacts it varies cross-culturally so it is critical that Marines understand local cultural concepts for law and punishment. Marines should consider: The methods people use to resolve conflict. Who resolves disputes? Do local people respect/participate in the system? Do local cultural codes of conduct conflict with state mandated ones? What are frequent disputes?

(d) Conflict over power. Understanding the cultural organization of power is critical for identifying the source and nature of conflict in a region. Conflict is often over relative power of two or more groups within the political structure of a society. Marines should consider: What groups hold the power and to what degree? Which are excluded? Do excluded group know they are excluded? Do these groups think they can challenge the system? How do they gain access to goods/resources? How will our alliance with one group affect relationships with other groups?

(5) Cultural Belief Systems. All cultural groups have a shared set of beliefs that unite individual members. A belief is a certainty, learned through inherited group experiences and practices about the substance and meaning of phenomena and human activity. Beliefs influence the way people perceive their world, resulting in a specific world view that structures and affects the way people in the group interact with each other. While it is easily accepted that a group's beliefs cause behavior, the reverse is also true; behavior causes group beliefs.

(a) Beliefs and behavior. How do cultural beliefs shape people's behavior? All cultures have a shared set of beliefs and symbols that unite the group. Beliefs are based on more than religion. Some examples include: Ideologies (Communism, slavery), history and stories, education, family and

tradition, religious beliefs (both formal religious systems and informal religious systems).

(b) Religious beliefs. Religion is but one component of belief systems. Marines need to distinguish between what people in a community do (their daily observance and practice of their religion) and what the formal religious authorities say they should do. Moreover, Marines need to understand that what they are told people *should* do and what they *do* is what *ought to be done*! Marines should consider the following when evaluating the role of religion in a society: How do people define and express religion? What roles do the groups hold in society? What does geography mean to these groups? What will our operations or alliances do to the groups?

**REFERENCES:**

MCWP 3-33.5 Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies  
Operational Culture for the Warfighter (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.)

[illegible]